

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The House Committee on Ways and Means, by a vote of 23-16, approved the "Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Protection Act of 2002" (HR 4090) today, sending the welfare reauthorization bill to the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote expected to take place later this month.

Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the Ways and Means Committee, voted against the resolution.

H.R. 4090 would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is due to expire at the end of this year. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 effectively put an end to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and replaced it with TANF, a block grant program aimed at moving the nation's impoverished away from welfare and into work. Whether or not TANF has been a success continues to be debated by congressional members.

"The last five years have indeed been witness to fewer people utilizing welfare funds from the federal government," Rep. Becerra said. "However, one in six children in this country still live in poverty and most of those who have moved off the welfare rolls are working in low wage jobs that pay less than \$7 an hour and provide no opportunity for advancement. Proper welfare reform should include meaningful educational and training opportunities for welfare recipients. Only when welfare recipients are properly trained will they be equipped to assume and hold real jobs with real advancement opportunities. The bill that passed out of Ways and Means today does nothing to improve job skills, and it does nothing to reduce poverty."

During today's debate on the TANF bill, Rep. Becerra introduced an amendment that would give states the flexibility to use the TANF bloc grant to serve legal permanent residents. "We should not be tying the states' hands on this issue," Rep. Becerra said. "We must give states the discretion they need to find and

combat poverty where it exists - and we should not force them to do this on their own dime. Since we implemented this bar five years ago, 23 states have used their own funds to assist the immigrant population. Now, times are tough, and the economic downturn has forced states to implement budget cuts. If we continue to uphold the bar, countless legal permanent residents, who work hard and honorably and provide a great service to this country, will be forced further into poverty."

Unfortunately, Rep. Becerra's amendment was voted down on a straight party line vote of 15-22.

H.R. 4090 is tentatively scheduled to come up for a vote by the entire House on May 15.